

Southern Discourse

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A Note from the Editor: A Longer Discourse

Christine Cozzens, Agnes Scott College



Christine

With this issue, Southern Discourse breaks out a new longer format—twenty-four pages instead of sixteen—and will start to come to you in two annual issues—fall and spring—instead of three. You'll receive one less issue, but the number of pages of material stays the same. In fact, because we have regular columns in every issue, with the new format there will actually be more space per issue for your contributions.

Like everyone else these days, we were looking to economize but didn't want to sacrifice quality or our print presence. Even more important, my student assistant editors and I found the third issue—with its April deadline and mid- to late May publication date—very challenging given that production coincided with final exams, commencement, annual reports, and other end-of-the-year pressures. Because we live in the southeast where school seems to begin mid-summer and end months before the rest of the country finishes up, that issue of SD arrived at its subscribers' addresses after the end of the academic year, languishing in mailboxes until September. And, best of all, the new format allows us to publish longer articles and keep our trademark photos—we are still the only writing center publication to use photos—that illustrate the work of writing centers in our region and beyond.

Please think carefully about what all this might mean to you. We need your writing just as much as ever, and we can now accommodate your longer pieces. As always, we welcome all kinds of writing linked to writing centers and related topics: essays, news, research, creative writing, reviews, humor, and more. Start thinking now about the piece you'll send us by January 10 for the spring issue, September 10 for the fall issue, and send me an email about it. Isn't it time for you to join our southern discourse?

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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

Exploring Art and Design Practices in the Writing Center

Jennifer Johnson, Savannah College of Art and Design

The heart of the design process is rooted in the realm of the visual. One of the oldest forms of communication, visual representations of ideas pre-date linguistic systems (Campbell, et al 94-95). Visual communication is all around us—from the texts we read to the programs we watch on television, there is an abundance of visual information which requires audiences to process and apply to their own understanding of the surrounding world. Writing itself came about through a visual representation of ideas, and educators continue this tradition by teaching young language learners with a “visual vocabulary before proceeding to a textual one” (Mullin 69). Taking this tradition into consideration, we can begin to see the value of integrating visual/design considerations with those of writing, ideas which themselves mirror those of writing: point of view, audience, arrangement (organization), clarity, context, cohesion, parallelism, tone, invention, and revision. Like the writing process, design is a process of inventing, revising, and editing, “an intricate interplay of elements, the integrated effect of [the] whole transcending the parts. Although the design process itself often progresses in a logical manner, it remains inherently dynamic, allowing for spontaneity, intuition, and change” (Ocepke v). The value of examining the two processes together is helpful for those who teach students with different learning styles, particularly visual/spatial; in particular, writing center consultants can rework

the artistic and design practices of artists into everyday writing center practice, thereby fostering an environment where all writers, no matter their learning style, can explore creative and design strategies as a means to facilitate planning, inventing, and revising throughout the writing process.

One of the first things a designer does when beginning the design process is consider the problem. For most designers, the problem is often introduced by the client—even still, designers must begin by understanding the nature of the problem and how they plan to address it. Jamie, an MFA student in graphic design at SCAD writes, “I begin by visually writing out my methods for the design problem in a cartoon set/sketch.” She acknowledges that the process of drawing her ideas in the form of a cartoon or sketch allows her to get her thoughts on paper, much in the same way one would with a free-writing technique. For Jamie, however, the drawing of her ideas allows her mind to explore multiple ideas at once, ideas she can then return to later and



Courtesy of Jennifer Johnson

modify in accordance with her overall design plan. In *Cracking Creativity: The Secrets of Creative Genius*, Michael Michalko writes about a similar idea regarding Pablo Picasso’s technique for generating ideas and organizing them for inspiration. Called thought cards, Picasso’s technique allows for the identification of a problem as well as possible solutions. Picasso believed that an artist “paints to unload feelings, visions, and thoughts”; he believed one must be able to uncover the process that led the artist to the final solution (Michalko 62).

Jamie’s method of visually representing all her thoughts on the topic mirrors that of Picasso; he would begin by observing all he could of his environment and then once his mind was “full,” he would empty those ideas, images, or sensations onto the canvas. By supporting these

creative explorations in a writing center setting, writers can explore the various possibilities available to them apart from traditional methods of inquiry as inspiration for beginning a writing project.

While it may be easy to see the use of design methodologies as tools for

gaining inspiration, they're also helpful at other stages of the writing process, particularly that of organization. Once a designer decides on a concept or idea, he or she will use what are known as design boards or storyboards as a visual means to represent information that can be more easily moved or organized into cohesive structures. A storyboard is simply a sequence of juxtaposed images; much like a traditional outline structure, a storyboard represents ideas in a logical, cohesive manner but simply represents these ideas visually in the form of pictures or icons: "The most important thing to remember when storyboarding is to make sure your sequence of images is telling the same story you think you are telling. It is all too easy to assume that they are doing so, but you need to pitch the story to people and then see if they got the same story and the message you intended" (Glebas 52). Ultimately, by using storyboards in place of a traditional outline, we can teach students to view creativity as a conscious, goal-directed activity in which problem definition plays a crucial role in the creative act.

Finally, revision, as part of any creative process, is essential for ensuring the best work possible. In the methodologies used by designers, "the process of writing finds a close parallel . . . in that both require research, creative and critical thinking on the subject, and the execution of several drafts that are progressively refined as the conceptual focus evolves" (McCarthy and Almeida 111). The question is how to incorporate particular design strategies into the revision process. In her article on incorporating art into writing, Beth Olshansky writes about the use of image-reading in the revision process: image-reading, "a method for recapturing [students'] original story detail," includes the use of collages to record a writer's ideas (Olshansky 354). These illustrations, especially if created during the brainstorming/drafting stages, allow students to remember ideas they might have forgotten but also allow them to use the visual images as cues for creating rich, detailed imagery throughout their writing. While Olshansky is writing about the use of collages in elementary and middle schools, she notes that its use is helpful for writers of all ages.

From my experience with the artists and designers at SCAD, I've seen similar uses of drawing and artwork as a way to enhance written work. For instance, students in survey art history courses must learn how to write both objectively and subjectively about a piece of architecture—they seem to have an easier time with the objective portion of the essay which simply requires them to account for what they see, no more. The subjective portion, which requires a more colorful descriptive voice, is often harder for them to write, especially

in the earlier stages of the writing process. As this assignment often includes a requirement to draw a detailed image of the architecture, I've found it helpful to have students refer to their own drawings of the work in order to find clues to what they want to write, what they feel or have experienced in their study of the work. These visual "records" work better for these students than a journal or notes would have because, for them, these images more clearly display what they saw, and even what they felt, at that moment. Looking back at the drawing they made at the time of viewing the work helps them to recall the feelings they experienced when first examining the artwork, and therefore serves as a more accurate representation of their initial reactions to the work, which they can therefore find more trustworthy than those that they may have developed after doing additional research or examination of the work. Our students, no matter where their skills or interests lie, have so much within their various disciplines that they can use to help enhance the writing process for themselves. As writing center consultants, we need to learn how to be able to recognize the differences in the learning styles of our students and be able to help them apply their knowledge from other areas to help them succeed in the writing process.



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Investing in Long-Term Tutoring Relationships

Neil Simpkins, Agnes Scott College



Neil Simpkins

When I applied to be a tutor at Agnes Scott, one requirement that made me both anxious and excited about the position was our Partners' Program. As a new tutor, meeting with a writer once a week for an hour for the whole semester (and perhaps the rest of our time together at Agnes Scott) sounded like the biggest challenge of the job. As I grew as a tutor, our Partners' Program became one of the most rewarding aspects of the position, mostly because of the challenges and advantages that it presents, those same apprehensions that I had when reading my tutor contract my first year.

Without the Partners' Program, I doubt that I would feel as confident as a tutor as I do now; through my participation in it, I learned more about tutoring than I did in almost any other facet of my position.

We structure our program at Agnes Scott through an application process where students return a short form explaining why they want to meet with a tutor regularly, along with a brief sketch of times that they might be available and other tidbits of information. Each tutor scans the applications and chooses two to three partners for the semester, unless we have a returning partner with whom we will stay. To me, the clearest benefits of the program are creating an intimate relationship with one person over the course of the semester, being able to set an calendar for due dates to create mini-deadlines with my writers, and (somewhat selfishly) learning how to adapt to writers who often have very specific and oftentimes more demanding needs from me as a tutor.

While writing center theory often cites professionalism as the best frame for entering the tutoring session (see many tutor training guides, including *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring*), working with a writer consistently often means that we move from a polite relationship to a much more personal one. This last summer and semester, for example, I was partnered with a nontraditional-age international student who lived off campus. After the first few meetings, we would always start the session with updates on our lives, our pets, and what it was like to live off campus when the majority of students are required to live on campus. She felt more comfortable sharing her anxieties of writing with me, and I felt like I could be more directive with her because I got a feel for her brash and comical personality. As we became closer as acquaintances, I was better able to adapt my methods to fit what she needed.

As a transgender man working at a women's college, I find that developing a personal relationship with my partners is particularly beneficial for me. For many of the people I tutor, I am the first transgender person they have ever talked to in their entire lives. Writers are often unsure about what pronouns to use with me and sometimes sidestep talking about gender and sexuality in the session. Because I meet with my partners regularly, I generally feel more comfortable coming out to them, and often my identity becomes a point of contact between me and my partners.

Since we meet weekly, I spend the first session with all of my partners going over their syllabi with them and setting writing goals for the semester. Together, we create a calendar on Google Calendar that I can layer onto my personal calendar. This helps us as a pair set goals for each session ahead of time. Our weekly sessions often act like miniature deadlines for my partners, and this encourages them to write multiple drafts and stay on track with their goals for the semester.

Without tutoring my partners, I would not have learned methods that extend out to my day-to-day tutoring. As tutors, we are often trained to use specific tutoring methods "topically"; for example, many tutor training texts are divided into sections that teach first a general methodology, followed by specific variations for ESL writers, writers with learning disabilities, or writers who are return-to-college students. I found quickly in my work that these designations are not very fruitful. A method like color-coding, which is often

prescribed for tutoring students with a learning disability, has helped me with a wide variety of students who do not identify with having a learning disability. Still, many tutors find that they fit into a groove with the kind of tutoring that they find most comfortable and rarely work through different methods that are outside of their tutoring style. With a partner, however, you are challenged much more to move away from your typical tutoring style to figure out what is best for your partner. My first and second year as a tutor, I worked with a creative writing major who rarely brought in work from other disciplines. At first, our sessions were incredibly difficult for me because I mostly tutor research papers and critical essays. Through our time together, I learned so many different tutoring methods that work for enriching creative writing—many methods which came directly from my partner, who was skilled in workshoping creative writing pieces and walked me through how to give her good feedback.

There are challenges to our partnerships, of course; on the whole, I do not feel like they outweigh the benefits, but it is worth it to discuss them. Because I really enjoy the company of my partners, I sometimes have trouble staying on task with my writer. When my relationships get to be more chatting than tutoring, I will take a few minutes to get back to work and to check in with my partner about her goals for the session. Occasionally, partner relationships will fail as well: approximately one partner per tutor per semester drops out of the program, either because she did not need the full hour every week or because her interest waned. This is often very frustrating for tutors and can eat away at our already stretched tutoring hours.

The partners' program can also create favoritism among tutors, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative results. One of my partners this semester told me at the beginning of one of our sessions that she "had another tutor look at the grammar and left the fun stuff for me." This made me laugh, and I was actually glad that she had seen another tutor for grammar issues. Coming from a rural high school in Tennessee, I do not know the

schematics of grammar as well as some of our other tutors do. However, we encourage our tutors to approach work holistically; because my partner asked another tutor to look at her grammar and not the whole work, this might have put the other tutor in an uncomfortable situation. On the other hand, I know that my partner visits the Writing Center often for all of her writing and not just for me. Perhaps our comfortable relationship helped her understand that the Writing Center is one place where she can get honest feedback and help from all of our tutors.

The most pressing challenge—and also the most rewarding—is that even close relationships with partners require work and investment, often requiring both parties to negotiate their identities, learning styles, and needs within the session to make it work. This semester, I worked with a senior on the first stage of her research project. All semester, we worked on her literature review about the relationships between Black Americans and recent Black African immigrants to the United States. We came to our sessions with very different identities: I am a white, middle-class, rural progressive queer transgender English major; she is a more socially conservative and religious sociology major who immigrated to the U.S. from Nigeria when she was in high school. Our sessions were full of push and pull. There were times where I would

exercise white privilege unknowingly, and she would often check me; likewise, I would often encourage her to think about how gender and sexuality would affect the responses she would get from her survey questions. Though we did not have the easy rapport that I had with other partners, we brought such varying experiences to each session that they were consistently refreshingly challenging for both of us. Ultimately, the Partners' Program is perhaps the facet of tutoring at Agnes Scott that I believe trains us best as tutors. ✨

(The author is currently a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin,



Courtesy of Agnes Scott College writing center

Accentuating the Positive in Writing Center Promotion

Scott Pleasant, Coastal Carolina University



Scott Pleasant

When I took over our university's writing center in the fall semester of 2010, I found that during the previous year, the center had served less than one-third of the students the math center had seen in the same timeframe. A three-to-one difference is clearly a cause for concern, so I looked into the center's promotional efforts and was surprised to learn that the center had done little in the way of advertising. I then made plans for campus-wide distribution of flyers, messages on the campus e-boards, articles in the student newspaper, visits to faculty meetings, class visits, and center tours. The content of the promotional materials would be simple and positive, with the

overriding messages being that the center is open to all students on campus and that both appointments and walk-ins would be served. After a few weeks, it became clear that the promotional campaign was working. At the end of that first semester, our center had served 2,054 students in one-on-one sessions. This number was more than the total of 1,995 from the entire 2009-2010 school year. I credit our success not only to the amount of promotion but to the positive quality of that promotion.

I designed our promotional materials very quickly and without consulting models from other centers. Then, after settling into the job for a few weeks,

I began reviewing the promotional campaigns of other writing centers and was immediately surprised by the amount of negativity I found there. The messages in promotional campaign can be divided fairly easily into two types: positive messages about what the center can do and negative messages about what the center won't or can't do. While any promotional effort might serve to increase business, I believe positive messages do a better job not only of attracting students but of communicating what the center offers.

To get a better idea of the kinds of negative messages common in promotional materials, let's look at two examples from what we'll call School 1 and School 2.

Informational videos have become a common form of promotion, and these videos often reveal a great deal about a writing center's attitude toward the students and faculty who seek the center's services. The overriding message of School 1's video is that the writing center is off limits to those who don't live within fairly narrowly defined boundaries. In a little under three minutes, it features two vignettes designed to "bust" common myths about the center. In the first scenario, a student sees a sign claiming that students who go to the writing center always receive A+ grades on their papers. She gives her rough draft to a consultant, who corrects it while the student talks and texts on her phone. The consultant gives the paper back to the happy student, who goes on to receive an A+ on the paper as promised.

The second scenario is directed not at students who expect too much from the center, but at faculty who require students to go to the writing center through extra credit, extended deadlines, or point deductions for non-attendance. The video shows that the result of these required visits is a long line of students who really don't "belong" in the center. One student begs for an appointment by saying, "but my paper is due tomorrow" when, of course, every other student's paper is, too.

The video questions whether anyone should ever be required to go to the writing center and debunks the value of extrinsic incentives. It also mocks students who wait until "the last minute" to get help. The goal of the video is to encourage "correct" use of the center, but students who see the video might learn instead that they shouldn't expect help from their consultants, that faculty who want to rely on the writing center for support are really

just overtaxing the system, that students shouldn't expect their writing to improve after going to the writing center, and that the writing center staff feels annoyed by students who come in on their schedule rather than at the convenience of the tutors. A viewer learns quite a bit about what this center would rather not do but very little about what it can or will do.

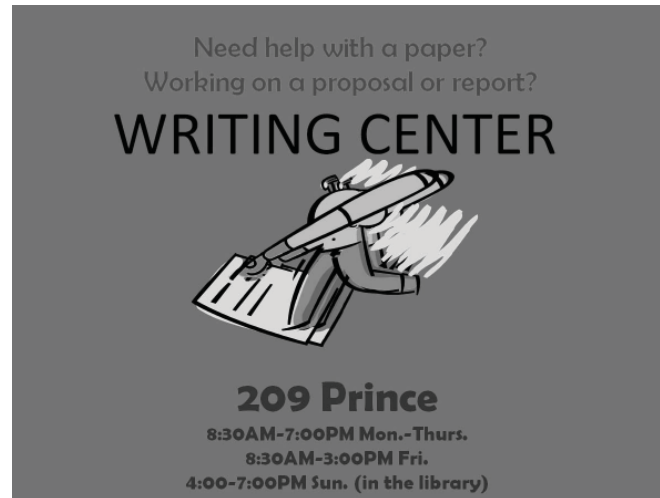
The tendency to define the writing center by what it can't do rather than by what it can do is hardly new. The title of Richard Leahy's 1990 article in *College Teaching* is typical of the negative approach. In "What the College Writing Center Is—and Isn't," Leahy writes about the "misperceptions of the center as a remedial and fix-it shop" and says that when faculty ask for proofreading help for their students, "We explain that the tutors are not allowed to do that." (45). In his commentary on the teaching of writing as a "recursive" act, he makes a distinction between the product-oriented classrooms of the 1960s and '70s and the process-oriented approach that he says began to dominate writing pedagogy in the early 1980s (46). Thus, he defines the writing center as place that does not perform proofreading duties or view writing as merely a product.

To be fair, Leahy does write about what the center should do, but he and many other writing center theorists feel the need to define the center also in terms of what it can't do. Clearly, all definitions work largely by negation, but we have to remember that students are unaware of the long-standing separation of writing pedagogy approaches into product- or process-oriented styles. Students who are not acquainted with the rhetoric of writing pedagogy may be unlikely to see the difference between "We won't proofread for you" and "We won't help you with proofreading." Limits need to be set, of course, but promotional materials such as School 1's video are not the best place to establish those limits.

Another important promotional resource is the WC Web site, and the negative messages from the Web sites for School 2 are quite typical of these sites. Near the top of the home page, students are reminded in bold lettering to "Call ... for an appointment!" The bold font and exclamation

point here might easily be read as "Don't even think about walking in here without an appointment!" as opposed to the more neutral "We recommend appointments." A short scroll down the page reveals that the center will accept walk-ins, but only "when Writing Assistants are available," a clause that seems to imply they usually won't be.

The Web site grows considerably more negative after it lists the center's hours. The home page includes a late policy that states, "If a student is ten minutes late, the appointment will be cancelled—no exceptions. The student will be recorded as a no-show, and the appointment will have to be rescheduled for another day." It goes on to warn students that if they "receive three no-shows in one semester, privileges will be revoked until the end of the semester." Any student looking at this Web site can be forgiven for finding it a bit intimidating and uninviting. Such policies might be necessary, but again, there is a better place than the home page to announce them. Perhaps a student could receive an e-mail after the first missed appointment, but such restrictions can only serve to put walls around the center when announced on the home page, especially when the negative messages are not countered by equally positive ones.



Courtesy of Scott Pleasant

A student who isn't put off by the negative messages on School 2's WC homepage might click on the link to "Tips for a Successful Visit," yet here also, the student finds negativity. The first rule for a successful visit is to "Be on time for appointments whether they are in the center or online!" Again, the sentence is followed by an angry-looking exclamation point. Certainly, it is important for students to be on time, but this rule does more to make the center's schedule manageable than to guarantee a "successful visit." By leading with a rule that students know is not primarily for their benefit, the Web site turns the focus away from student concerns and toward the needs of the center. The message is that this is our center and that our main goal is not to be inconvenienced students.

The final item on the “Tips for a Successful Visit” page warns prospective visitors to “Know that we can help you become a better writer over time, not in one thirty-minute session.” While this statement may be intended as a positive commentary on the value of repetition, focus, and dedication, few students are ready to make a distinction between the incremental improvements that can be made to a specific paper in a thirty-minute session and the lifelong process of becoming “a better writer.” If the paper is improved after a session—and most papers are—a student is likely to be happy for that improvement and relatively unconcerned about the long-term effects of repeated sessions. Still, the best way to get that student to return for repeated sessions is to offer a reasonable chance for immediate, if incremental, improvement. A student who is told that real improvement is unlikely with one session might very easily read this warning as an admission that the center can’t really help at all. After all, if visiting the center can’t lead to writing improvement in thirty minutes, why would multiplyin the zero improvement in that session times, say, ten sessions lead to more improvement? Zero times anything still equals zero.



Courtesy of Scott Pleasant

The messages in School 2’s Web site are directed at an ideal student—one who understands that “we can help you become a better writer over time” does not represent our failure to help with the current writing project. The Website is simply making the well-accepted distinction between text-centered and writer-centered pedagogy, but we need to be careful to avoid messages that assume student have made this distinction. In “Centering the Writer or Centering the Text: A Meditation on Shifting Practice in Writing Center Consultation,” Matthew Ortoleva expresses some frustration with the binary opposition of these two approaches, but he clearly privileges a writer-centered

approach that values the fostering of a writer’s skills over the correcting of specific errors. Still, he says that in his experience, “student motivations complicate the [tutoring] scenario” because many students “come into the writing center text-focused” (n. pag.). In this article and many others which echo its concerns, the writing center’s tutoring agenda is seen as the “correct” one while the student’s more immediate concerns are seen as less important. While tutors and center directors may understand the need to focus on

long-term skill development rather than simply working toward a corrected text, a student cannot be expected to apply one of the theoretical constructs that informs our pedagogy. Promotional materials such as the Web site for School 2 not only damage the center’s image for students but serve as a confusing mixed message. Makers of such promotional materials should encourage students to come to the center first and communicate the philosophy of the center later.

Of course, students who visit School 1 or 2’s centers almost certainly receive excellent assistance. Promotional materials are only that—advertising tools that attract students. After the students have entered the WC, we can work with them, but not until that point. Thus, developing positive promotional

materials is an essential part of a coordinator’s job and one of the most important aspects of WC operation. Those materials should communicate an open-door policy that encourages students to see the center as an academic support, but too often, they tend to present the writing center in a much more negative light. ✨

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Compass Points: Practicing What We Preach

Pamela B. Childers



Pamela B. Childers

At the 2011 Conference on College Composition and Communication annual conference in Atlanta, I attended a session that truly impressed me. As a WAC and writing center director for thirty years, I have recently participated more in roles of consultant, mentor and editor at the Research Network Forum and

Newcomers Think Tank, for instance; however, I have loved sitting in the audience to hear about new research and topics of interest. So, without skipping a beat reading through the program, I stopped at a session entitled “Writing and Deep Learning: The Impact of NSSE/WPA Research¹ on Assignment Design,” featuring one of my heroes, John C. Bean, author of *Engaging Ideas*. The title of Bean’s presentation, “What Do We Mean by ‘Meaning-Constructing’ Assignments?” preceded one by his colleague, Writing Center Director Larry C. Nichols, entitled “Writing Assignments/Writing Center Consultations: Partners in Constructing Meaning.”

Many of us have had years of experience facilitating faculty workshops on the creating of authentic assignments as part of either our WAC or writing center programs, and we have all wondered how to make these sessions more effective. Well, here was John Bean not talking at us but communicating with us, even giving us a workshop activity to take home and use at our own institutions. He began with the following quotation from a member of the department of economics at Seattle University: “I have discovered that poor student papers are often the result of a poorly designed assignment. Improving my

assignment design has made assignments more enjoyable and easier to grade” (Gareth Green). What a testimonial all of us would like to hear more often! Bean then presented the problem that “despite their best intentions, many instructors who support WAC/WID create ineffective writing assignments.” He offered the NSSE/WPA research as a solution to this problem because it “uses empirical methods persuasively to connect good writing assignments and teacher practices to deep learning” and “leads faculty to their own ‘aha! moments’ about the rhetorical power of their assignments.” Of course, I have had to summarize all that Bean stated in his clear handout, but here was where he deviated from many other presentations and practiced what he preached: he developed a short workshop module to illuminate the research and help faculty refine their own assignments or create new ones. He provided the workshop design, which included the “Five Variations” group activity, a one-page explanation of the NSSE/WPA research, a page connecting the research to other WAC/WID research and theory, and further examples of assignments rated high and low in “Meaning Constructing” for use by anyone attending the session. Always a professional, Bean included three assignments rated high, then noted for the assignments rated lower, “These less effective assignments all derive from good faculty intentions” (all of the low-rated assignments are fictitious). Finally, he did not just present these low-rated assignments but offered possible revisions for each as part of the discussion.

Larry Nichols followed Bean’s presentation with a connection to the Seattle University writing center with this question: “What does our experience in the writing center tell us about why we should encourage professors to create assignments that reflect the three primary traits² highlighted by the NSSE/WPA project?” Nichols surveyed twenty-three consultants to “better understand how written prompts influence their sessions with clients.” He shared the results of the survey and concluded with the following “Primary Takeaways”: Written prompts reflecting the NSSE/WPA criteria encourage client and consultant engagement, improve writing center work, and inspire student writing that will more likely meet the professors’ expectations. He also stated,

- Clients arrive better prepared to engage in thinking and writing.
- Consultants are more easily inspired to engage deeply with clients.
- Sessions engage more deeply with ideas and developing writing.
- The writing center functions more fully in line with its mission.

•Professors are more likely to receive compelling finished essays that match their expectations.

Carol Rutz also presented on “Changing Teaching, Changing Learning Through Improved Writing Assignments” that described the Tracer Project between Carleton College and Washington State University. For information on the project, you can go to <http://serc.carleton.edu/tracer/index.html>.

Then, this summer at the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing conference hosted by the University of Limerick Regional Writing Centre, John Bean once again presented a worthwhile session on “Teaching Rhetorical Reading of Primary Scientific Literature to First-Year (American) Undergraduates.” Bean presented his problem of whether first-year composition students (all science novices) could be taught to read primary scientific literature with a reasonable degree of rhetorical understanding. Using appropriate research, he continued by presenting his pedagogical strategies, offering sample student responses to reading assignments, and ending with a question as to whether it is possible to integrate some of the strategies into a science curriculum. Here was an international audience responding to legitimate questions that teachers of reading and writing across disciplines face. And, John Bean left all participants with an organized handout and ideas to ponder.

Why are these presentations so valuable to us? Here is authentic research that I can refer to in planning and facilitating workshops for faculty in the future, but more important is the professional way in which they were conducted with respect for colleagues across disciplines, practical application of theories, a clear desire to share workshop materials and questions with peers around the world, and a sense of dignity for our profession. We can all benefit from these presenters’ practicing what they preach. ✨

Notes

- 1 National Survey of Student Engagement/Writing Program Administrators Research Project on Writing and Deep Learning
- 2 The three primary traits of the NSSE/WPA Research Project are to encourage interactive writing activities, assign meaning-constructing writing tasks, and explain writing expectations clearly.

Bringing Grammar Back into the Writing Center

Bonnie Devet, College of Charleston



Bonnie Devet

Since the 1970s, when writing centers started to proliferate on college, university, and high school campuses, centers have tried to avoid being labeled as “comma clinics,” “grammar garages” (Waldo 415), or even “fix-it shops.” These unhappy labels would have portrayed centers as helping only with grammar, when, of course, the mission of centers was to assist with all parts of the writing process. Centers should not be faulted for eschewing these labels. After all, in order to establish their credibility, centers were trying to show their campuses the full scope of their services.

But something was lost. By stating they did more than merely handle commas and semi-colons, centers cast a pall over the study of grammar, limiting its role to that of “being correct.” Today, however, the Writing Center at Prince George Community College (PGCC) in Largo, Maryland, with a campus of 18,000 students, is reversing this misconception of grammar. Instead of grammar’s being characterized as a cleanser and corrector, the PGCC Writing Center sees grammar as “the sum total of our language expertise, the building blocks of words and the principles on which we assemble them in meaningful ways” (Saylor). To bring about this sea change for grammar, the PGCC Writing Center, staffed entirely by faculty, has at least one of its tutors designated as the resident grammarian: Sherry Saylor (MA—University of Tennessee-Knoxville). By doing so, the PGCC Writing Center is returning grammar to its vital, important role in the writing process, thereby serving as a model for other writing centers.

“Bringing Grammar Back” continued on page 21

Back to the Center: Working from Two Centers

Philip Adams and Myleah Y. Kerns, East Carolina

East Carolina University's original writing center opened in the English department in 1983. Though it was a pretty traditional model and reinforced the idea that writing belongs to English, for seventeen years it did serve students writing for any reason on campus. Then in 2000, an administrative restructuring split peer-tutoring writing support services on ECU's campus.

Our English department kept its writing center space and shifted focus, evolving its services into the First-Year Writing Studio (FYWS). The FYWS became a place dedicated to tutoring students writing exclusively for the first-year composition sequence (ENGL 1100 and 1200). To support students writing beyond first-year composition, the university developed the University Writing Center (UWC). The UWC joined with the existing WAC program to form the new University Writing Program, a program of Academic Affairs.

After the reorganization, it was our challenge and our goal to develop a coordinated writing support system that sees students progress through first-year composition and the FYWS to their upper-level writing courses and the UWC. Using the split as an opportunity to reimagine our services, we hope that our system has grown into one with complementary components that serve our students well.

Because most new students take ENGL 1100 their first semester, they also begin their experience with writing centers at the FYWS, which offers these

writers a safe space to adjust to college writing. With around 4,000 students enrolled in scores of FYC sections, the FYWS can focus exclusively on the outcomes and objectives defined by the composition program and assist writers in meeting those goals through work on the course assignments

In this way, the FYWS is more like an extension of the FYC classroom. Students receive the guidance of English graduate assistants trained specifically on their situation, people who may have even taught and can offer insider knowledge of the FYC courses. The consultants assist students in deconstructing assignment, genre, and instructor expectations; they guide them to make choices considering multiple, often neglected, outside factors including classroom discussions and texts. They also often assist students with more than just individual writing assignments; they help students navigate the university, understand their syllabi, and even contact their instructors.



Courtesy of Philip Adams and Myleah Y. Kerns

To provide even more structure and establish expectations for those first-year students, the FYWS encourages students to make appointments and can arrange for a student recurring meetings with the same consultant. Consultants here are more likely to develop longer-term relationships with individual students, working with them over the course of one or two semesters, rather than just one assignment.

With the specific focus of the FYWS and the structure it provides for the students, the consultants there, who are all English graduate students, can get valuable experiences, too. Along with the traditional training in writing center theory and practice, the consultants themselves become more familiar with the goals of our FYC courses. They spend time with the kinds of students they will likely be teaching soon and even get some classroom experience by visiting classrooms and delivering writing workshops there.

All of this specific knowledge will inform the GAs' own experiences teaching

composition later. The work in the FYWS broadens their understanding of first-year writing students, and prepares them to create a classroom environment that better ensures those students' success. So we can see the FYWS also as a transition space for English graduate students in a way that parallels the first-year students' experiences there.

The First-Year Writing Studio has naturally kept its central location in the English department. It's down the hall from instructors' offices and surrounded by classrooms where many students take the FYC courses. It's where the English graduate students take classes and work as well. Its proximity to and visibility in everyone's first-year writing experience contribute to a smaller but supportive learning community.

Once students finish their foundational composition courses and move on to writing in their majors, they can visit the University Writing Center. ECU offers around 200 sections of writing-intensive course every semester, so we know that students are busy adjusting to the new conventions and expectations of writing in their majors. They should be transferring the skills from FYC to these new contexts, but likely still need help with the process. The UWC is better suited to these more experienced writers, and offers them the chance to work with peers from a variety of disciplines.

Our locations and our staff both reinforce the notion that the UWC is more writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) oriented. After the separation, the UWC moved into a space just down the hall from the FYWS, still very close to the English department. This proximity didn't do much to distinguish the two services, so soon after its creation, the UWC established a satellite model and planted smaller sites in classroom buildings across campus. At its peak, the UWC was in nine places on campus. Some of the sites went underused and folded, but the UWC still

maintains four locations to reach students across campus. In 2009, the UWC's main site was relocated to ECU's main library, so now it's in a place where a lot of writing is happening, and one that feels truly cross-curricular.

The UWC staff also reflects our broader mission, bringing together students from various majors and creating a more "peer" environment. The graduate students in the FYWS are always more expert than the students they help. They work from a stronger position of authority. In the UWC, consultants relinquish more of that authority, and challenge the writers to make more independent decisions with their own writing. The mutual environment makes session even more collaborative and reinforces the notion that students are part of a larger learning community.

Our separate staff training reflects these different purposes, too. Tutors in the FYWS are often also looking ahead to their time as compositions instructors, so they can consider the transferability of their FYWS practices to the classroom, while the UWC's focus is exclusively immediate: how can we get better at doing the specific work of tutoring across disciplines?

In most every way, the UWC environment expects more of the writer—the exposure to disciplinary conventions, higher critical thinking skills, greater confidence as a writer, more initiative to visit us—but we think we should expect those things.

After all this, we understand that there are disadvantages, too. It's confusing sometimes for students, and we do a fair amount of redirecting people to the right place. Even for faculty,

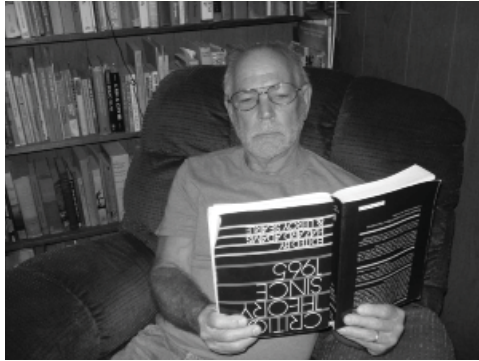
especially those teaching first- and second-year courses, understanding the distinctions between our centers and conveying those to their students is not always high on the priority list. Because of the confusions, we occasionally either lose students who give up quickly or duplicate efforts. We think, though, that the benefits have outweighed the drawbacks.



Courtesy of Philip Adams and Myleah Y. Kearns

What's the Point? Insights of a Ph.B.

Peter M. Carriere, Georgia College and State University



Peter M. Carriere

As Shakespeare's King Henry cried out to his troops at the Battle of Agincourt, "Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more!!" So once more into the breach, we examine the work of Estelle B. Hunter, Ph.B.—this time enunciation exercises and how to avoid telescoping words.

"Your enunciation will improve," writes Ms. Hunter, "only if you learn how to control your breathing and

the use of your jaw, tongue, and lips." How in the world are my students going to control their breathing when they're learning to use their jaw, tongue, and lips???? This idea makes no sense to me, especially during the evening when students, who should be writing essays, are seriously engaged in allowing their breathing to get out of control while learning how to use their jaw, tongue, and lips! I think they should be learning to control the use of their pens, pencils, and keyboards, don't you? Then it would be easier to control their breathing.

The advice above about lips, jaw, and tongue is in a small booklet subtitled "Lesson One." Each booklet (or "Lesson") contains the same categories of advice, as in perfecting enunciation. In booklet 2, Ms. Hunter declares, "Your lips and jaw are very important organs of articulation." Unfortunately, they are important organs of other things, too. However, Ms. Hunter conveniently ignores this understanding. But my students don't. And I'll bet yours don't either!

"You should exercise your jaw and lips," writes Ms. Hunter in booklet 2, "just as a pianist exercises his fingers by playing scales. . . ." Now this is truly ludicrous! I would never want to witness a student, mine or anyone else's, playing scales with their lips!!! Or with their jaws, either!! Truly absurd advice if you ask me.

But here's the most egregious and suggestive advice, again from booklet 2: You will secure the best results if you will stand or sit erect with your head up, your chest up, and your abdomen in. Inhale slowly and then exhale slowly three times. Then repeat aloud the lip exercise given below:

Ee oo; ee oo; ee oo; ee oo

A oh; a oh; a oh; a oh

Ee oo; ee oo; ee oo; ee oo

A oh; a oh; a oh; a oh

I really don't think my students need the lip exercise Ms. Hunter suggests. In fact, I would say that this exercise is actually accomplished during the lip, jaw, and tongue exercises they engage in during the hours when they should be writing essays.

Unfortunately, Ms. Hunter goes on to give advice on the "ee oo a oh" exercise that my students certainly don't need: "when you make the sound of "ee," stretch your mouth back toward your ears as far as you can. . . ." Now I draw the line here!! No, no no!!! We should never give students this kind of lip and tongue advice!! Absolutely not. Even writing about it I'm embarrassed!!

Another bit of embarrassing advice that Ms. Hunter gives is this: "when you make the "oo" sound, be sure that your lips form a circle." What can I say? I always understood that grammar and punctuation rules had a seamy underbelly, but until this advice from Estelle B. Hunter, Ph.B., I never knew how crude and barbaric these rules had become!!

Less provocative, however, is her advice on "telescoping words," which she defines this way: "Running words together is known as 'telescoping words.'" Her prime examples concern the word "you." "Unless we are careful," she writes, "we distort it [you] into 'jew,' 'chew,' 'yuh,' 'ya,' and several other incorrect sounds." So we might say, "whadjew do last night?" Or "Dontchew admire

Ms. Hunter’s lip exercises?” Not really such bad advice, of course, but who doesn’t say “wouldjew” or “dontchew”? She’s right in saying, “perfecting your pronunciation of this one word will go far toward making your speech distinctive.” Of course, if we did pronounce the words distinctly, we would probably lose friends. So my advice is to go ahead and telescope. In fact, it might be a good idea for Estelle B. Hunter, Ph.B., to telescope her lip and tongue exercises, too. Unless, like our students after hours, we look forward to these exercises. In which case we would have to ask, “What’s the point?”

“Back to the Center” continued from page 13

For over a decade, our centers have worked together effectively in a way that, while perhaps not ideal, has made sense. It’s taken us a while to figure some things out. Initially, seeing a rationale for this split was difficult. We hadn’t seen other writing centers that looked like this. We weren’t convinced of this model’s efficiency or effectiveness. We weren’t even sure that we could maintain two distinct centers. But we’ve come to see some strong advantages in our structure. We’re striving for a balance between serving the specific needs of one group of writers and reaching a broader, more experienced population of writers. Our two centers allow us to serve those goals separately, instead of using one center to serve dual purposes.

Much of our work thus far has relied on the coordination between the two centers’ administrators and our interest in developing a better experience for the student. The organizational separation left the two centers independent of each other, and for a short while, we didn’t communicate as well as we could have. As we improved our separate services, we knew that coordination was imperative.

Recently we’ve experienced more change that will help the two centers’ relationship. The University Writing Program (UWC and WAC) was moved into the English department, opening more possibilities. With the UWC much closer to the FWYS now, there are again decisions to be made about our writing center structure. We are still maintaining our separate centers and working to integrate our styles and our services better, but changes are on the horizon. In the next year, we’ll be adding a new administrative position to bridge the gap between the two centers and further unify our vision. With this new position, we’ll get to re-imagine our roles, our places, our relationship. A

By the Numbers

East Carolina University undergraduate and graduate enrollment	27,000+	
	First-Year Writing Studio	University Writing Center
Number of tutors each semester	15-20	15-18
Hours open per week	35	45
Locations	1	4 (main site, 3 satellites)
Face-to-face sessions last year (2010-2011)	1,190	1,573
Drop-in sessions	39%	100%
Online consultations (2010-2011)	n/a	874
Percentage of appointment-based sessions	61%	0%

Popcorn and Newsreels: Just a Bill

Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina,
Aiken



Karl Fornes

As a kid, I learned all I needed to know about American history and grammar from Saturday morning television. One lesson featured a “sad little scrap of paper” named Bill. Bill is a legislative bill who is approached by a curious young man wanting to know why the anthropomorphic litter is loitering on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building. Bill explains that he’s “just a bill, yes I’m only a bill, and I’m sitting here on Capitol Hill. I hope someday I’ll be a law! Oh, how I hope and pray that I will, but today I am still just a bill” (Schoolhouse Rock). Go get ‘em, Bill!

Apparently, Bill has been fortunate enough to make it to a congressional committee; he appears simultaneously excited and exasperated. “Well, now I’m stuck in committee so I’ll sit here and wait while a few key congressmen discuss and debate, whether they should let me be a law. Oh, how I hope and pray that they will, but today I am still just a bill.” Through the keyhole of the office door, several “point-of-orders” are heard above the general commotion (Schoolhouse Rock). Bill has an uphill journey.

What, exactly, was going on behind that door? The cartoon features a brief glimpse of two congressmen engaged in debate but otherwise leaves the details of the committee behind the door, out of sight. I had always understood the legislative process as collaborative writing made public. Bill refers to being “stuck” in committee, but, as most in our field will testify, the collaborative process is often a messy and time-consuming process. Call me naive, but, when I think of committee work, I used to think of the collaboration in which we engage every day. To me, an important part of my job is to encour-

age students to practice a craft at the heart of our political and legal system. I decided to test that assumption. I wanted a peek inside that door.

I asked a colleague in political science about the process. He turned pale and looked away, muttering. I pressed him. He had been there. . . once, he explained through a quivered whisper; he had seen a “mark up.” He backed away slowly, eyes wide, “you don’t wanna go there.” He raised his hands, palms out, as if pushing me away and stepped back slowly, shaking his head. “You don’t wanna go there,” I heard once more as he disappeared around a corner. I received an email later. “If you must,” my colleague warned, “you can check the C-SPAN web site.”

Was I afraid? Pshaw! I scoff at danger. I sneer at fear. A lesser person might choose just any bill. Not me. I would find the Big Kahuna, the bill the Wall Street Journal called a “1,990-page runaway train” (“The Worst”), the bill Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi urged congress to pass “so that we know what’s in it” (Pelosi); I would study the Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009, also known as the Health Care Bill.

The committee “discussed” the bill in 22 sessions over 14 days from June 17 to July 15 for a total of almost 70 hours. And this was after a committee in the House of Representatives added over 300 amendments to the thing. I tried. I honestly tried. I just could not get myself through it. I started earnestly enough, watching Senator Dodd open the discussion, and then, almost on cue, Senators McCain and Dodd spent fifteen minutes discussing the merits of even considering the bill before Dodd made his “opening” statement. Then the fun began. Amendment after amendment proposed, discussed, debated, and voted on (“Affordable”). And again, and again, and again, and . . . it was horrible. It felt like the super-slow motion at the end of Rocky III with Rocky Balboa and Apollo Creed trying to pull themselves from the canvas, scratching and clawing at the ropes. This time, though, that’s the entire movie and the movie is seventy hours long.

I clicked to YouTube and watched “David After Dentist” sixty-three times. I felt better.

I began preparing for a class I’m teaching this fall and came across James Reither’s critique of the early process theories of writing. Among his concerns,

Reither notes that the act of writing cannot be “separated from the social-rhetorical situations in which writing gets done, from the conditions that enable writers to do what they do, and from the motives writers have for doing what they do” (Reither). Unlike in our writing centers and our classes, the congressmen discussing these bills are not motivated by the quality of the written work in the context of improving as writers. Rather, they are motivated by the principles they think serve our country best and represent the people who elected them to support those principles. The result is compromise, at best. Let’s have a look at the first sentence of the one section of the bill providing health care options for those with pre-existing conditions.

(2) REQUIREMENTS. A qualified high risk pool meets the requirements of this paragraph if such pool (A) provides to all eligible individuals health insurance coverage that does not impose any preexisting condition exclusion with respect to such coverage; (B) provides health insurance coverage (i) in which the issuers share of the total allowed costs of benefits provided under such coverage is not less than 65 percent of such costs; and (ii) that has an out of pocket limit not greater than the applicable amount described in section 223 (c) (2) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 for the year involved, except that the Secretary may modify such limit if necessary to ensure the pool meets the actuarial value limit under clause (i); (C) ensures that with respect to the premium rate charged for health insurance coverage offered to eligible individuals through the high risk pool, such rate shall (i) except as provided in clause (ii), vary only as provided for under section 2701 of the Public Health Service Act (as amended by this Act and notwithstanding the date on which such amendments take effect); (ii) vary on the basis of age by a factor of not greater than 4 to 1; and (iii) be established at a standard rate for a standard population; and (D) meets any other requirements determined appropriate by the Secretary. (“Patient”)

George Orwell couldn’t translate that thing.

My Saturday morning vignette ends with Bill becoming a law, there is much rejoicing, and school buses still stop at railroad crossings. The health care bill became a law, there was some rejoicing but more gnashing of teeth, and several Republican presidential candidates have vowed to repeal it. Go get ‘em, bill. ✨

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“It’s Due When?” Coping with Procrastinators in the Writing Center

Jane Bowman Smith, Winthrop University



Jane Bowman Smith

Ask tutors what problems they are having in the writing center around midterm and the word “procrastinators” is regularly heard. Students who schedule appointments on the same day the paper is due exasperate tutors, even those who admit they often procrastinate themselves. The tutor knows she cannot perform effectively in this last-minute situation; a tutor cannot help the student gain the knowledge the professor

expected would take a month or more to master in one thirty minute session. But what has struck me in discussing this issue with the tutors at Winthrop University is the depth of their frustration. They tend not to sympathize with the students who come in at the last minute; instead, they admit to being angry with them.

These tutors usually say the problem is their inability to help the student effectively. But I wonder if something else is going on. Because tutors tend to be among the strongest students in the university, they have accepted their professors’ definition of academic success and the academic work ethic. As Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith argue in *The Practical Tutor*, “they are aligned with the academic enterprise. They may, furthermore, mistakenly believe that their tutoring can be considered successful only if the student performs well in school: they have an investment in the student’s achievement” (18). When student writers procrastinate, their behavior implies that they do not care, that they are lazy or disorganized, and thus challenge the tutors’ beliefs about the importance of the collaborative work that defines a successful tutorial. In

a sense, the tutors are defining the work of the tutorial as product rather than process. The session’s products—the clearly improved paper or newly-learned strategies—are what matter; it is harder for them to evaluate the collaboration and acts of negotiation that are the process. And there is another aspect of the product orientation: if the student has a thirty minute tutorial, standard for our center, the tutor cannot possibly help the student write an entire paper in that time. Some tutors feel they have not done their jobs in such circumstances.

But we need to be aware that the tutors’ underlying negative assumptions about these students can damage the tutorial, even if their attitude is not overtly expressed to the student writer. The tutor can inadvertently make a student’s tendency to procrastinate a good deal worse, and procrastination is clearly a widespread problem. A study of 291 students, conducted by Laura J. Soloman and Esther D. Rosenblum, reported that 46% of these students stated “that they nearly always or always procrastinate on writing a term paper” (505). Students were also concerned about their tendency to procrastinate: “23.7% reported that it was nearly always or always a problem when writing a term paper” (505). Writing center tutors procrastinate just as other students do.

What is different about a writing center tutor’s procrastination? When the Winthrop tutors discuss their own tendencies toward procrastination, several points become clear: first, they “procrastinate” because they are prioritizing their work, looking for what is due soonest or perhaps what professor is perceived to be the most rigorous grader. Other assignments naturally get pushed back. Second, they rely on practical and practiced strategies that enable them to get through the work quickly when it’s necessary. They do not want to rush through a paper; it may be a necessity given the demands of a particular term and schedule. Sometimes they admit that a particular professor or a class creates apprehension—and they are much more likely to procrastinate in those situations. Finally, their misunderstanding of the composing process itself comes into play; often they believe they are procrastinating because they delay drafting until very close to the due date. Yet from their discussions of how they are processing the assignment, these students are often researching and working very hard mentally; there is no visible “product” because their prewriting strategies have been internalized. Because they do not write a lot down—there is no visible evidence of the work they are doing—they see themselves as procrastinators. They do not define the internal work they are

doing as progress toward the final paper because the “product” is not external and visibly present.

I do not agree with the tutors that these behaviors (with the possible exception of fearing a professor’s reaction to the final product) are actually true procrastination. Indeed, what tutors need to understand is that self-destructive procrastination—the kind that makes a student come into the Center the day the paper is due with nothing but the assignment sheet and a very few ideas—can be a result of serious writing apprehension. The students in Solomon and Rothblum’s study reported seven factors that lead to their procrastination: fear of failure, aversion to the task and laziness, dependency, risk-taking, lack of assertion, rebellion against control, and difficulty making decisions (507). However, the two most frequently cited factors were fear of failure (49.4%) and aversion toward the task and laziness (18%) (507). Solomon and Rothblum define such fear of failure complexly; it involves “anxiety about meeting others’ expectations (evaluation anxiety), concern about meeting one’s own standards (perfectionism), and lack of self-confidence” (507). Thus, in many cases, writing apprehension underlies procrastination, and thus students arrive at the center just before their work is due.



Courtesy of Jane Bowman Smith

Donald McAndrew offers a definition of writing apprehension based on the work of John A. Daly and Michael D. Miller: “an individual difference associated with an increase in anxiety when one is faced with situations requiring writing. A certain amount of creative tension is present and necessary in all writers, but for some the situation brings on a destructive amount of tension” (43). Apparently, the causes of such “destructive tension” lie in a student’s past experiences with writing and particularly with evaluation. Patrick Bizzaro and

Hope Toler agree, arguing that after all, writing is an exposure of the self to others, and this exposure affects a writer’s self-esteem. We should keep in mind that an individual’s self-esteem develops over a lifetime: students perceive themselves to be good students or bad, good writers or bad, based upon their perceptions of themselves. And these perceptions are given to them by others, usually teachers. (38)

Mike Rose, in a study of writer’s block—which I would argue is closely related to procrastination and another result of writing apprehension—argues that past instructors can cause problems in other ways even beyond their evaluation practices. Students who tend to “block” do so at least in part, he states, because they cling to destructive practices that negatively affect their ability to write: “blockers may well be stymied by possessing rigid or inappropriate rules, or inflexible or confused plans. Ironically enough, these are occasionally instilled by the composition teacher or gleaned from the writing textbook” (153). And these students are often inflexible, unwilling to relax their grip on rules that actually hurt them. For them, writing is not self-expression, but a test of what’s been learned. However, it is the results of writing apprehension that most clearly affect tutors. In their 1975 study, Daly and Miller suggest several destructive results of writing apprehension: anxiety about evaluation, an avoidance of writing when possible, even to the extent of not turning in assigned work, or being

absent when writing will be required in class (244). In some ways, given how destructive writing apprehension can be, we are fortunate that some students do find their way to the writing center, even when they focus on their deficiencies with writing rather than on trying to write. We can help them with problems that seem to them to be too difficult to solve.

In order to help tutors work effectively with procrastinators, tutor

training should consider the underlying causes of procrastination, perhaps most importantly writing apprehension. They must understand what triggers procrastination: a past history of ineffective writing instruction; too much dependence on rigid rules that disallow flexibility with writing; and unfortunate grading practices that have emphasized the importance of rules at the expense of self-expression. Tutors need to understand that procrastination is a form of self-defense; students put off their writing for as long as possible until forced into the work by the mounting pressure of the deadline. Also, the myth that “I do my best work under pressure” enters in here: despite research that suggests this is indeed myth and not fact, students persist in believing it because it allows them to avoid self-recrimination.

Helping tutors to develop a useful and workable approach to procrastinators takes three steps. First, in their training classes or staff meetings, tutors should engage in reflection aimed at helping them understand their own levels of writing anxiety. My intern-tutors read about writing apprehension and then write a reflective paper on their own complex attitude toward academic writing. In working through this paper, discussing the assignment in groups, and then doing peer review (in which they do “role-play” tutoring), the intern-tutors come to a more conscious understanding of their own attitudes and what causes them to procrastinate. It’s difficult to get them to see that procrastination is not always laziness or unwillingness to do the work, but this step is very important; in order to help their clients in the center most effectively, they have to redefine the term for themselves and see their own behavior in a more objective light and without the negative connotations.

Second, the interns must move from the personal to recognizing that this problem affects other student writers: we discuss the “triggers” that cause procrastination, not just in students who are more successful writers but in inexperienced writers. Intern-tutors often believe that helping students learn time-management skills will be the best solution, but Solomon and Rothblum’s study suggests otherwise: it is useful to keep in mind that procrastination is not merely a deficit of study habits and organization of time but involves a complex interaction of behavioral, cognitive, and affective components. For the group of procrastinators who report fear of failure, intervention strategies that address evaluation anxiety, perfectionism, and low self-confidence might be appropriate. (509)

The third and final step is crucial: tutors must become consciously aware of the strategies they regularly have used to break through their own anxiety and to start writing. The strategies then become part of their “script” for use in a tutorial.

The following is a workable process that we have found useful in the Winthrop Writing Center when tutoring a procrastinator:

1. Tutors need to be aware that the ways in which they discuss writing in a tutorial—especially too much attention on correctness and form—can further the student’s writing anxiety and lead to more procrastination.
2. Tutors should do a brief interview with the student to determine, if possible, the reasons for procrastination. Mike Rose suggests that “rather than get embroiled in a blocker’s misery” (160), quickly interview the student to get at the root of his or her problem. Discover the rules or fears that underlie the student writer’s need to procrastinate. The tutor may then be able to break that cycle by offering more flexible and useful strategies that the tutor him- or herself uses.
3. Help the student break the paper into manageable steps, a list of things that need to be done. Many students have “missed the lecture” on the composing process and write their papers all at once at the computer, trying to combine prewriting, research, revising, and editing in one marathon session. No one can survive that very well!
4. Examine the list of things to be done with the student and do the one that seems least painful at that moment. Tutors should get the student to write something; even a single paragraph, a positive accomplishment, helps the student to move forward.
5. Finally, emphasize the self-expressive nature of all writing, the creativity in the prewriting process. It’s called “invention” for a reason! Even armed with greater understanding and tutorial strategies, tutors will become frustrated with students who come in the day their paper is due. Given their desire to help students finish a paper productively, that’s not surprising. But having a workable process for the session and strategies that tutors can use to help students even at the last minute, and which may actually begin to change the student’s negative attitude about writing, may be the most helpful thing that we can do. ✨

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Courtesy of Bonnie Devet

"Bringing Grammar Back" continued from page 11

When students need grammatical help, they sign up for appointments with the center's grammarian who does not proofread students' papers. Instead, Saylor teaches clients how to use grammar to reflect their thoughts and intentions, the seminal role grammar has played in language since the days of the medieval trivium of rhetoric, logic, and grammar (Glenn).

As she works with students to help them understand the structures underlying English sentences, students see, for example, that run-ons and fragments reflect not "errors" but problems in thinking about relationships. In effect, she shows clients that structure and intention (form and function) go hand in hand, like a couple walking on a beach. Her other technique is to ask student writers to identify what they think is their most significant problems. Then, when clients read aloud their papers, the editing problems, according to Saylor, "pop right out" so that she is merely guiding them in the editing process. With about seventy out of 100 of her tutorials focused on developing grammar expertise, Saylor believes an appointment with her becomes, for the clients, a time to learn structures of English and to use those structures for the best effect.

The PGCC Writing Center does even more to promote a new view of grammar. Through the auspices of the Writing Center, Saylor also offers a weekly ninety minute Grammar Clinic, the idea for which came from the PGCC Writing Center Director Abby Bardi. Starting in the third week of a semester, Saylor presents ten non-credit sessions. Unlike other centers who might offer sessions on avoiding errors, such as comma splices and fragments, the Grammar Clinic presents a more comprehensive view of grammar as "a net to capture meaning" (Saylor). With the fundamental structures of English grammar being stressed, the medical implication of the word clinic disappears and is replaced with the concept of a place where students become better writers and readers.

To reveal this power of grammar, the Grammar Clinic begins with Pamela Dykstra's famous bicycle analogy for the English sentence where the first wheel represents the subject, and the back wheel is the predicate; baskets, symbolizing prepositional phrases, participial phrases, subordinate clauses and the like, can be loaded in the front, the middle, and the back of the bike-sentence. With this fundamental analogy in mind, students, in subsequent weeks, progress to recognizing nouns, verbs, adjectives, and structure words

not by using the traditional (and contradictory) definitions for the parts of speech, but by applying linguistic definitions, such as nouns have determiners (a, an, the) and can be made possessive (a book and a book's title). Thus, the clinic gives attendees an overview of how English functions—the parts of its machinery—so that students can work with their sentences in creative ways.

Since first offered in 2009, these sessions have attracted over fifty students and non-students alike, some of whom are regulars while others only drop in. How can English grammar be covered in only ten weeks? Saylor says she is rather like the famous Reduced Shakespeare Company, which presents all thirty-seven of the Bard's plays in only ninety-seven minutes; so, she sees herself as the "Reduced Grammar Company," highlighting the fundamental structures and forms of English in order to remind students of how much they already know about the language.

Saylor has other plans to help revitalize the role of grammar in writing. As co-president of the Assembly for the Teaching of Grammar (ATEG), an NCTE-affiliate which stresses new ways to teach grammar, Saylor hopes to start a Grammar Guild. This group composed of professionals interested in grammar and writing would serve as resources for schools, leading workshops for faculty and going into classrooms to teach grammar's role in writing. This service would focus on all levels from elementary to high school. The need to see grammar in a new light never ends for the resident grammarian in the PGCC Writing Center.

For over thirty-five years, the famous grammarian Diana Hacker taught at PGCC and tutored in its writing center, leaving behind a legacy of caring about students and their writing. Saylor, who worked with Hacker, continues the grammatical tradition, fostering a new perception of grammar in writing centers and among students. Although Moliere famously said, "Grammar lords it over kings," the PGCC Writing Center hopes students will be "the kings who lord it over grammar," so that they develop their writing and become confident with the language.

Letter from the President

Kevin Dvorak, Nova Southeastern University

Hello SWCA Members,

When I became president in early 2010, many of the newly elected (and some returning) board members and I met for dinner during CCCCs in Louisville. One of the goals we set that evening was to strengthen local networks throughout the region. Now, about eighteen months later, I can confidently say that we are achieving this goal.

Last Friday, I attended the SWCA Florida Director's Day hosted by our state representative, Kate Pantelides, at the University of South Florida. The event proved to be one of the most rewarding professional meetings I have attended in quite some time, as it allowed directors from around the state to get together to talk, workshop, and learn from one another over the course of one day. Perhaps most importantly, though, it gave us the opportunity to do some serious community-building with those who work so closely around us, yet often seem so distant. In fact, at the end of the day, a director from another institution, who happened to be sitting next to me, told me quite frankly that this had been one of the most enjoyable professional events she had ever attended. I agreed.

I hope you have noticed that these statewide events have been occurring throughout the region during the course of the last several months. In addition to the recent Florida gathering, North Carolina held a very successful Director's Day in April and is hosting another one this fall; Georgia held a breakfast event when CCCCs was in Atlanta last spring; Kentucky held two meetings for directors between July and September; Tennessee held a successful workshop for Directors and Assistant Directors in September; South Carolina is scheduled for a great day of workshopping in late October; Florida will be hosting a brown bag lunch at the upcoming NCPTW in Miami this November; and Jaimie Crawford, our new SWCA high school representative,

is in the early stages of organizing a gathering for directors of high school centers throughout Florida. Whereas the organization used to hold one meeting in one location each year—the conference—we are now in the midst of a ten month span (February-November) during which the organization will have hosted at least ten events throughout the region. Wow! That is some serious community-building in action! And I thank you all for being a part of it!

In addition to hosting these statewide gatherings, our state reps have started to grow their own state pages on our website. I hope these pages continue to grow and continue to show the work we are all doing every day throughout the region. We can often get lost in the work we do on campus, in our centers, and in our own classrooms—all of which is extremely important—but we need to remember that there are many people working at surrounding schools we can also help and who can help us, as well. During the recent gathering at USF, I learned some fascinating things others around me are doing and found myself thinking, "I am going to do that, too!"

We need to keep growing our community-building process, and I hope all of you will become a part of it. You are more than welcome to contact your local state representative to find out the latest news about what is happening in your state—and, if nothing is currently planned, you are more than encouraged to plan something! Ask your state rep for help! Ask the executive board for help! Ask ME for help! That's what we are all here for!

Finally, I hope you all have plans to attend the exciting SWCA Conference in February. Rusty Carpenter, Leslie Valley, and the rest of the staff at Eastern Kentucky University have an amazing event planned—and everyone is invited and highly encouraged to attend! I hope you are all enjoying your fall terms, and I hope you have enjoyed Southern Discourse's new format.

Best wishes,

Kevin

Southern Discourse



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SWCA Mission Statement

The Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) was founded in 1981 to advance literacy; to further the theoretical, practical, and political concerns of writing center professionals; and to serve as a forum for the writing concerns of students, faculty, staff, and writing professionals from both academic and nonacademic communities in the Southeastern region of the United States. A member of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), an NCTE Assembly, the SWCA includes in its designated region North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and the American Virgin Islands. Membership in the SWCA is open to directors and staff of writing centers and others interested in writing centers from public and private secondary schools, community colleges, colleges and universities, and to individuals and institutions from beyond the Southeastern region.

